
Volume 7 | Issue 1

9-18-2022

Tourist Behaviors in Lodging – Part One

Mary Jo Dolasinski
DePaul University

Joel Reynolds
DePaul University

Chris Roberts
DePaul University

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr



Part of the [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dolasinski, Mary Jo; Reynolds, Joel; and Roberts, Chris (2022) "Tourist Behaviors in Lodging – Part One," *ICHRIE Research Reports*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr/vol7/iss1/1

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE). It has been accepted for inclusion in *ICHRIE Research Reports* by an authorized editor of DePaul University School of Hospitality Leadership. For more information, please contact rr@depaul.edu. The compilation of the journal issue is copyrighted by ICHRIE, but authors retain the copyright for their article.

Tourist Behaviors in Lodging – Part One

Mary Jo Dolasinski, Ph.D.

Joel Reynolds, Ph.D.

Chris Roberts, Ph.D.

DePaul University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This series of three reports was developed to discuss tourist behaviors in three key areas of the hospitality industry: lodging, dining, and activities and events. A primary purpose was to provide insights from the user's perspective, as the majority of content comes from the provider's point of view. One paper focused on tourist's behaviors while dining and another focused on tourist's behaviors in activities and events. This paper focused on tourist's lodging behaviors. The goal was to provide valuable insights to assist practitioners in better understanding tourist's behaviors and to develop strategies to provide the best experience possible.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is constantly evolving to meet current needs. Safety, security, health, and wellbeing are not new expectations of the industry but have taken on greater importance in recent times. While staying in lodging establishments, eating in restaurants, and participating in activities or structured events, travelers behave differently than they do when at home. Disruptors such as the explosion of advancement in computer technology and the 2020-2022 pandemic are examples of forces of change in tourism and hospitality.

Travelers are people who are away from home. It can be an energizing feeling to be free from the responsibilities and routines of daily life at home. It can be exciting to anticipate something new during your journey. Your traveling partners can often share the same feelings. Taken together, these components help create an uplifting outlook about the upcoming trip.

A portion of that uplifting feeling is the idea of 'letting loose' or engaging in behaviors that aren't typically done when at home. It often includes a willingness to open one's self to new inputs, different experiences, and other potential influences of change. It can be fun to move into the role of a tourist. A question, though, is how far differently tourists behave when away from the usual social mores, routines, and duties of home life and what drives their behavior.

Key components of that tourist's experiences include where they sleep, the restaurants they patronize for food, and the activities and events in which they engage. The lodging can vary from budget level to extravagant resorts. The restaurants might range from fast food to 5-star Michelin fine dining. The activities might be independent visits to theme parks, museums, or historic attractions. Or they might be participation in more structured events such as a convention, trade show, or a milestone life event.

Lodging, dining, activities and events have been experiencing changes as a result of several disruptors. The role of new technologies is a major disruptor and has changed behaviors in terms of selection of destination and choices of activities. What hasn't changed is that there are still customer expectations and behaviors that differ when staying at a hotel, dining at a restaurant or experiencing an activity or event. Another disruptor that is having a significant impact on behavior is the pandemic of 2020-2022. At the time of this writing, the world is experiencing a pandemic that has been a major disruptor for the hospitality and tourism industry. It has temporarily-or perhaps permanently-altered the way that tourists are acting. As we emerge from the current pandemic environment, we predict that that while there may be some additional health and wellness behaviors, there will be a refocus on the expectations and behaviors discussed in this paper.

LODGING GUEST BEHAVIOR

Lodging facilities are alluring places that uniquely capture the realities of our world where the lines between public and private spaces, labor and leisure, fortune and failure, desire and despair are regularly blurred (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Levander & Guteri, 2015). Hotels are a domestic space, a home away from home, where guests are freed from many of the traditional constraints of being at home (Roberts, C., Young, L., & Johanson, M. J., 2019). The hotel space is shared by hosts (employees) and guests who each need their own public and

private areas. Guests are not allowed into the back of the house, such as behind the registration desk, inside the kitchen, or within administrative offices. Similarly, hosts (employees) are expected to treat guests' rooms as if they belong to guests throughout their stay and may only enter with permission. An exception is housekeeping staff who are allowed to enter, typically when the guest has left, to clean the room (Schneider & Turner, 2017).

Often times, the hospitality employee is treated as an invisible non-person tasked with creating a positive experience (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Schneider & Turner, 2017). If there is a spill in the lobby, no questions are asked, and hotel staff magically clean it up. If more towels are needed in a room, additional towels are delivered promptly upon request. While guests might see housekeeping personnel in the hallway, most back-of-house employees are largely invisible to guests. Thus, the provision of the lodging experience is a binary: those who experience the lodging stay (guests) are conceptually and physical separated in the front of the house from those who provide it (staff) in the back of the house. This separation is maintained, even while both sets of people are present and perhaps temporarily engaged with one another. It is viewed as an essential component of creating the lodging experience for the guest.

Hospitality is a ritual filled with oppositions requiring both a guest and a host who each come to the lodging experience with levels of both trust and suspicion (Lynch, Germann Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011; Sandoval-Strausz, 2007). The current-day English words, *hospitality*, *host*, *guest*, and *hotel* have their origins from the Latin words, *hospes* and *hostis*. Paradoxically, the words *stranger* and *enemy* are also derived from the Latin *hostis*. Hosts are confronted with unknown guests, who may be potentially hostile, yet hosts are expected to welcome these guests into their premise and community. At the same time, guests are in a foreign, unfamiliar land and yet must trust their hosts enough to eat and sleep in their premises.

As long as humans have been travelers, regardless of their host's religious persuasion, there have been places of refreshment and refuge to welcome them (Lashley, 2016; Lashley & Morrison, 2000; Sandoval-Strausz, 2007). Well before the Roman Empire, inns were common stopping places for travelers. By the 1760s, the word, "hotel," had become a part of the English language. It was derived from the French word *hôtel*, a term for a nobleman's grand home. In English, the term evolved into meaning a high-quality guesthouse.

In the mid-1800s, due to the development of the railroads and decreased working hours for the middle and upper middle classes, the hotel became established as a social institution. It was a place where leisure could be conspicuously enjoyed by an increasingly growing number of consumers (Matthias, 2004). Hotels became arenas where the grand and the inspiring-to-be grand classes could see and be seen. Hotels often assumed the role of status symbols. To be the guest of a prestigious hotel indicated a person's socioeconomic situation. Guests came to enjoy a hotel's never-ending experiences; a meeting spot for the exchange of services, goods, and information.

In the United States, the lodging industry continued to develop, particularly after the 1921 U.S. Federal Aid Highway act granted \$75 million to improve the country's road systems (Jakle, Sculle, & Rogers, 1996). By 1950, there were 28 recognized names on the U.S. federal highway guide for hotels and motels (with the word "motel" created from a contraction of the words motor and hotel). The U.S. Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 (US Public Law 84-627) led to further investment in the national roadway system, creating the vast Interstate Highway

System that connected all corners of the continental United States. This significantly increased the mobility of the American traveler, which resulted in the need for more lodging facilities.

These affordable way stations continued to expand the lodging experience to an even larger group of consumers than ever before. Hotels and motels were more than just places to sleep. They were places where many travelers watched their first color television, used their first coffee maker, and experienced their first shag carpet.

Innkeepers common law is a series of legal precedents that govern running hotels (Bell, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Sandoval-Strausz, 2007). This body of rules applies to inns, taverns, motels, and hotels and is broken into three categories known as the holy trinity of hospitality: bed, board, and hearth. The first common law is to provide a bed for anyone willing to pay a reasonable price. The next law is to offer guests food and drink, also known as board. The final element of innkeeper law is refuge or hearth. As travelers are vulnerable to theft and violence, it is the responsibility of the innkeeper to protect their guests.

Components of the Lodging Stay

There are four behavioral dimensions of an overnight stay. These included individual safety and security, health and wellbeing, the comfort of daily routines, and the personal level of responsibility for the facilities. These components can be used to better understand the human's behavior while in the hotel.

Safety and security. When asleep, every human is physically vulnerable. At home, the individual becomes familiar with the setting, learns the sounds and feel of the environment, and can make necessary adjustments in order to believe that the access points, such as doors and windows, are secured. What the subconscious detects when one is asleep becomes familiar and comfortable. When sleeping away from home, the individual wants the same feeling so that he or she can sleep without fear of intrusion or attack. In a lodging facility, the guest is new to the room. All aspects of familiarity are replaced by foreign sounds, smells, temperatures, and even air currents. Door and window locks probably operate different from those used at home, but the guest wants to assume that the security is adequate so that they can sleep in peace.

This sense of safety and security extends throughout the entire lodging property. Guests assume that once they enter the facility, that they are protected. They assume that the hotel has adequate safety protocols in place, such as human security guards, video cameras, secured entrances and exits, etc. Whether in the lounge, café, or in the open lobby area, guests assume the mantle of hotel security envelopes them in a blanket of safety.

Health and wellbeing. Guests want hotel public spaces and a hotel room that is clean and free from harmful germs and disease. This aspect of the lodging experience has been previously studied (Cadotte & Turgeon, 1988; Dolnicar & Otter, 2003). The presumption is that the room, which includes the sleeping space and the bathroom, has been sanitized and is a healthy physical environment. The bed linen and bathroom towels have been replaced with clean, sanitized items. The bedspread is routinely laundered, the carpet thoroughly vacuumed, and the furniture has been dusted and wiped clean. The typical expectation is that the room is a private space that has not been contaminated; that the guest is living in an environment that is free of disease and that his or her wellbeing is protected by the housekeeping department; that no taint of a prior guest remains.

This expectation of wellbeing extends to all of the public spaces within the hotel. Guests presume that the spa or gym facilities are sanitized on a regular basis. They believe that the food service and beverage facilities and products meet local sanitation codes. They assume that lobby furniture is clean and safe to use. All of this is in spite of frequency of use. There may have been people using that piece of exercise equipment in the gym, or sitting on that lobby couch, just moments before the guest arrives in that space. But the guest still presumes cleanliness. The guest uses these hotel spaces with a sense that a level of care has been extended by the hotel that includes their own health and wellbeing.

Daily comforts of life. When at home, an individual can develop habits and preferences for dressing, bathing or showering, use of cosmetics, and the selection of linens and towels that meet personal preferences. Soaps, shampoos, toothpaste, etc., are selected that best accommodate one's individual personal features, tastes, and needs. Clothing is purchased and stored, laundered, and ready to wear. Daily routines are developed over time to aid one in getting ready for the day after having a healthy night's sleep.

During the lodging stay, the traveler duplicates some of these items through what is packed in luggage. Transportation restrictions, such as security concerns at airports or issues of weight with luggage, impact what can be brought along. Hotels often provide some of the more common supplies such as soap, shampoo, and body lotions. They also supply towels, sheets, pillows, etc. While these amenities are needed by most travelers and fulfill their purposes, the brand, quality, and texture may not match that which is at home. The traveler makes allowances for these differences, sometimes contentedly, sometimes not, knowing that the compromise is temporary as it is only for the short length of the lodging stay.

There are other aspects of daily life that require adjustment. The machines and devices in the room are probably not the same as in the home. The room temperature controls are likely different and the guest must spend a bit of time working with them in order to achieve the desired warmth or coolness. Time is spent experimenting with the shower controls in order to produce a water temperature that is comfortable. The windows are typically covered with some sort of curtain or blind, which is likely different from what is at home. The room lighting may be too bright or too dim, causing the guest to make necessary adjustments. The remote control for the television usually requires study in order to operate the set correctly. Overall, it takes the guest a bit of time to learn how to manage these room features.

Similarly, the guest may use features of the hotel that require adapting to differences. The menu items may not mirror what is consumed at home. The hours of operation of guest services may be different than desired. For example, the restaurant may open at 6 A.M. but a guest may be used to eating breakfast at 5:30 A.M. The brand of oatmeal or the method of cooking it could result in a different texture or flavor. Such variances require the guest to adjust their individual routines of daily life.

Sense of responsibility. To a guest who is renting the space, there is a sense of entitlement. The hotel room becomes the person's home for that night. Whether the guest is feeling detached from the space ("it's just a room") or views it with loving care ("it's my home for now!"), the payment gives the guest the belief that they have the right to use the space in any reasonably private way that is desired.

However, in contrast to how the home is provisioned, the guest is well aware of the transitory nature of an overnight stay. The guest will not have to live with the consequences of

his or her actions in that room. If a piece of furniture is dinged by an awkward movement of a piece of luggage, the guest won't have to see the marred item after checkout. If a towel is used to clean shoes, the guest knows that housekeeping will take the towel away and replace it with a clean one. If the curtains are pulled slightly from the overhead rod when attempting to open or close them, the guest knows that hotel maintenance will conduct repairs later. If food is dropped onto the bedspread when eating while watching television, the guest knows that housekeeping will take care of the matter. The room can be as hot or as cool as desired and lights operated continuously with no consideration given to the utility costs.

In short, the guest feels a limited sense of responsibility for the room features and services. Certainly, if something significant were to happen, such as the television screen is smashed or the bed is set on fire, the guest is aware of personal liability. But absent of something major of this nature, the guest forgets about the room, and anything that may have happened therein, the moment he or she departs on the day of checkout. In contrast, the home is something that is provisioned for over a long period of time. Furniture is purchased with certain functions or styles in mind and is expected to be used for many years. If it is damaged, even in the slightest manner, the owner is responsible for any repairs. Utilities are generally paid separately from mortgage or lease payments so care is exercised in managing their monthly use. Laundered items, such as clothing, sheets, towels, etc., are handled much more carefully as the owner intends to use them many times over the years.

This attitude often extends throughout the lodging facility. Guest use of the gym equipment, spa, the swimming pool, etc., is often casual and careless as there is little to no consequence if a machine is abused, if towels are damaged, the pool water fouled, or if beverages are spilled. Patrons drinking in the bar begin to relax after consuming alcohol and the accompanying lowering of inhibitions could result in spills and glass breakage, loud and foul language or laughter, or even abusive behavior toward staff. In summary, guests of a lodging facility treat their physical environment differently than they treat the physical environment in their home. They have a reduced sense of responsibility and increased sense of entitlement while staying in a lodging facility.

These dimensions are the same ones that travelers address in their own homes; however, the priority given to each is different when in a lodging facility. The short-term nature of the lodging stay in an unknown facility engenders a heightened sense of needing to sleep in a safe space and wanting to clean and dress in a hygienic environment. The act of purchasing the right to the lodging space also engenders a sense of entitlement. The lodger feels ownership of the space for the time it has been rented.

That feeling of limited ownership comes with a sense personal power to use the rented space as desired. Often, the first desire is to recreate the comforts of home. A desire for the familiar while traveling results in an attempt to replicate some of one's daily life comforts while incorporating and adjusting to those provided in the hotel room. Accompanying this is the sense that responsibility is lessened in the temporary lodgings when compared to permanency of home. The guest knows that any minor misuse of room or facility features will be forgotten after checkout since it is all provided by the vendor for a nightly fee. The guest walks out the door with hardly a thought about what occurred during the stay. Likewise, the hotel staff quickly forget the departing occupant as they prepare for the next.

This discussion of how guests behave in a lodging guest room is intended to capture observations of how a human being perceives and interacts with the rented sleeping space and larger lodging facility when away from home. The behaviors are distinctive when viewed in this different environment. The typical traveler does use the lodging facility differently than their own home.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Lodging spaces blur the lines between home and being in public. Their rooms are their personal and private domain during the time they are staying there but there are parts of the hotel that are for employees only. Leaders in lodging should be attentive to the constantly changing guest needs and how they can customize the guest stay while they are in the lodging facility. In other words, do not hold one image of the guest and make decisions primarily on that basis. In addition to customizing the guest stay, leaders need to be thoughtful of the four components of a guests stay. Guests are vulnerable during their stay as their primary activity is sleeping. With the pandemic, there has also been a heightened sense of health and well-being and it is likely to continue as a key concern for many years. Safety, security, cleanliness and sanitation need to be treated with the highest level of importance. Lodging managers needs to go beyond just the necessities and provide products and services that help individuals recharge and get ready for their day. Finally, guests feel a limited sense of responsibility for their room and other areas of the hotel. There is a sense of entitlement, paying for the privilege of freedom not experienced in their own homes.

CONCLUSION

Looking back in history, humans have travelled for various reasons that include religious pilgrimages to seeking thrilling adventures. Traveling introduced the need for places to sleep, eat, and be entertained. Regardless of the lodging type, the expectation is a safe and secure establishment, with rooms and public areas being clean and free of disease. Guests of the lodging establishment want the daily comforts of home and feel that they are entitled to their assigned room for that night. These factors are the key drivers of their behavior. Consistent throughout the tourist experience is that their behavior is often different when travelling versus being at home. Finally, with disruptors like the technology explosion and the 2020-2022 pandemic, future research will need to explore changes in customer expectations and behaviors to inform the future of hospitality and tourism practices and research.

REFERENCES

- Bell, D. (2009). Tourism and hospitality. In *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*. London: Sage.
- Cadotte, E. R., & Turgeon, N. (1988). Key factors in guest satisfaction. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 45-51.

- Dolnicar, S., & Otter, T. (2003). Which Hotel Attributes Matter? A Review of Previous and a Framework for Future Research. In T. Griffin, & R. Harris, *Proceedings of the 9th Annual Conference of the Asia Pacific Tourism Association (APTA)*, 1 (pp. 176-188). APTA.
- Guerrier, Y., & Adib, A. (2000). 'No, we don't provide that service': The harrassment of hotel employees by customers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 14(4), 689-705.
- Jakle, J. A., Sculle, K. A., & Rogers, J. S. (1996). *The motel in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lashley, C. (. (2016). *The Routledge handbook of hospitality studies*. Taylor & Francis.
- Lashley, C., & Morrison, A. (2000). *In search of hospitality: Theoretical perspectives and debates*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Levander, C. F., & Guteri, M. (2015). *Hotel life: The story of a place where anything can happen*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books.
- Lynch, P., Germann Molz, J., McIntosh, A., Lugosi, P., & Lashley, C. (2011). Theorizing hospitality. *Hospitality & Society*, 1(1), 3-24.
- Matthias, B. (2004). A home away from home? The hotel as space of emancipation in early twentieth-century Austrian bourgeois literature. *German Studies Review*, 27(2), 325-340.
- Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2006). Hotel Babylon? Exploring hotels as liminal sites of transition and transgression. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 762-772.
- Roberts, C., Young, L., & Johanson, M. J. (2019). Theory of lodging. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 43(8), 1135-1152, DOI: 10.1177/1096348019879488
- Sandoval-Strausz, A. (2007). *Hotel: An American history*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Schneider, A., & Turner, T. (2017). Behaviour under the condition of anonymity: A visual analysis. *Visual Studies*, 32(1), 148-155.